

Post 9/13/72

For the Record . . .

The "Uselessness" of Army Spying on Civilians

The following is the conclusion of "Army Surveillance of Civilians: A Documentary Analysis," a report by the staff of the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights:

The major impression from our long study of these files is their utter uselessness. The collection of this information, and its attendant infringement on the constitutional rights and privacy of American citizens, has sometimes been justified on the grounds of necessity, chiefly that of public safety. Yet, it appears that the vacuum-cleaner approach of collecting all possible information resulted in great masses of data on individuals which was valuable for no legitimate (or even illegitimate) military purpose. These vast collections of fragmentary, incorrect, and irrelevant information—composed of vague conclusions and judgments and of overly detailed descriptions of insignificant facts—could not be considered "intelligence" by any sense of the word. They reflect an unfortunate tendency within the government to react to the problem of civil disturbances by conducting widespread and indiscriminate and duplicative surveillance. The result is a great collection of information which gives the illusion of knowledge, but which hampers the ability of responsible officials to make intelligent decisions. Unfortunately, it appears that the Army intelligence, uncertain of its stateside mission, took refuge in surveillance and dossier-building, and thereby deluded itself into thinking it was "doing something." In fact, it was merely wasting time, money and manpower, and infringing on the rights of the citizens it was supposed to be safeguarding.

The practical question which remains to be considered is how the scope of the Army's domestic intelligence operations can be controlled so as to guarantee that such unnecessary and wasteful data gathering which endangers civilian control of the military, individual rights and personal privacy will not reoccur when the present concern over military surveillance subsides.